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The New Beer Bibles a Man Should Read

November 9, 2011, by **Evan S. Benn**



Funny thing about being a beer writer: I receive more books about beer than actual beer. The majority of them — the ones that open with "the differences between ales and lagers" — are a bore. Lucky for me, then, that three recent releases are anything but. If you're looking to give something to yourself or the beer-lover in your life this holiday season, you might want to consider picking one of these up. After all, a book about beer is the next-best thing to beer. Trust me, I know.

The major release of the year is the highly-anticipated *The Oxford Companion to Beer* (Oxford University Press, \$65). Big both in size (a whopping 960 pages, or four pounds) and in concept, the *OCB* is the result of years of research by editor Garrett Oliver, brewmaster of Brooklyn Brewery, and his team of 166 contributors from every corner of the ale world. Even *Top Chef* head judge Tom Colicchio drops in with a food-focused foreword. The encyclopedic chapters include everything from history (there's a seven-page entry on Germany) to personalities and styles. In other words, there's a little bit for everyone, and it's easy to drop in anywhere you want. How else would I have found out that in Japan, a man will often declare "Torიაეზუ ბირუ!" ("I'll start with a beer!") when he enters a bar? Yes, the price tag is steep (you can find it cheaper online), but the insight is worth it. And if you pick up a box set in person at Brooklyn Brewery, you even get — yes — a free beer.

Greg Koch isn't shy about promoting craft beer, especially those dispensed by his own Stone Brewing Co. in San Diego. I mean, the man travels with a megaphone. Now he has a new way to evangelize: *The Craft of Stone Brewing Co.: Liquid Lore, Epic Recipes, and Unabashed Arrogance* (Ten Speed Press, \$25). Koch teamed up with Stone co-founder Steve Wagner and spokesman Randy Clemens (who's also author of *The Sriracha Cookbook*, where we found one of our favorite Michelada recipes) to create a tome that is equal parts brewery history, surprising food recipes incorporating Stone's bottles (stir-fried Brussels sprouts?), and lessons in homebrewing. You'd want to be a Stone enthusiast already (you can pick up their pale ale many places), but then it's just about perfect.

And anyone who's ever held a bottle of He'Brew Beer or Coney Island Craft Lager knows something about enthusiasm. Jeremy Cowan runs his Shmaltz Brewing Co. with a fair amount of shtick, but, circus-sideshow labeling aside, it's clear that Shmaltz owes at least part of its success to Cowan's ability to not take himself too seriously, which is accounted for in *Craft Beer Bar Mitzvah* (Malt Shop Publishing, \$16.99), a look at the brewery's 13-year history. Chapter titles like "Pomegranates and Cocksuckers" are anything but conventional, but then again, neither are some of the best beers. *Bar Mitzvah* is another reminder of how weird — and wonderful — the industry can be. At the very least, it's more interesting than most books about a business startup.